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County budget talks set for another round

Delegation at odds over final numbers

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NEWPORT — The Sullivan County delegation continued to discuss the status of the current year's county budget for more than two and a half hours earlier this week.

The meeting, which was the second continuance of a meeting originally called in mid-May by Rep. Peter Franklin, D-Newport, will be continued yet again next Monday, June 11.

Delegation members have expressed concern over the past month that the current year's budget, totaling more than \$20 million, will be exceeded. Franklin, the delegation's chairman, has been the most outspoken about the way finances within the county have been handled.

"We've disregarded some sound advice from the auditors and we're going to be left with a rather large deficit," Franklin said.

Not all delegation members agreed with Franklin, including state Rep. Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport.

"I don't see the need to have such a drawn-out conversation about something that might not even happen," Rodeschin said in regard to the possible deficit.

Rodeschin became so fed up with the discussion last month that she and County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio walked out of a meeting when Franklin pursued the issue.

Commissioner Ben Nelson agreed with Rodeschin, saying he expects there will be no deficit in the budget.

"I have to rely on the accountant in matters like this, but I think we're going to be in good shape come the end of the (fiscal) year," Nelson said following the meeting. "At the end of the third quarter we were looking at a \$100,000 deficit, but it's hard to tell where the numbers are going to end up."

Nelson said it becomes hard to balance expenses with revenues because expenses are usually in place much sooner, creating the need to borrow money in the short term.

Franklin asked the commissioners office for budget figures

as of May 31, stating the reports were computerized and could be printed at any time.

"And I mean a complete budget, including expenses and revenues," he said.

But Nelson said the process wasn't that simple.

"We'll try to get the numbers to the delegation as soon as possible, but it's not as easy one might think," Nelson said. "They need to be proofed and finalized, you can't just hit the print button."

Also at Franklin's request, County Commissioner Ethel Jarvis said she will check with Gil de Rubio about where surpluses are recorded within the budget.

The original meeting on May 15 was called by Franklin so he could ask Gil de Rubio about the status of the budget. Gil de Rubio and Rodeschin ended up walking out of the meeting after Franklin questioned the county manager's ability to do his job.

Jeff Graham, the county's certified public accountant, was questioned by Franklin for several hours on May 21 over the intricacies of the budget.

Graham was asked whether or not the budget will be balanced by the end of the fiscal year, and he responded by saying it was impossible to predict how the final numbers would end up.

Neither Gil de Rubio nor Graham were present at Monday's meeting, a point which offended Franklin as much as anything pertaining to the budget itself.

"It's unacceptable for the county manager to 'stiff' the delegation like he has been doing," Franklin said. "We as a group have things that we need to get done in a timely basis and I find it hard to believe that the manager could not make it here. It's insubordinate."

Many on the delegation pointed out that Monday mornings are a busy time for people and that it's unrealistic to expect someone to be able to make every meeting.

It was decided to recess the meeting until next Monday, June 11. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for 9 a.m. at the commissioner's conference room, 14 Main St. in Newport. The meeting may be pushed to later in the afternoon to allow Gil de Rubio and other administrators to be present.